

November 9, 2021

The Honorable Kiran Ahuja
Director
U.S. Office of Personnel Management
1900 E Street, NW
Washington, DC 20415

Dear Director Ahuja:

As co-chairs of the bipartisan Congressional Caucus on Foster Youth (Caucus), we ask you to identify opportunities to enhance pathways to federal government internships and careers for former foster children. For several years, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has spearheaded the effort to attract students and recent graduates to the federal workforce. In 2010, President Barack Obama issued Executive Order 13562, *Recruiting and Hiring Students and Recent Graduates*, recognizing that, “the Federal Government benefits from a diverse workforce that includes students and recent graduates, who infuse the workplace with their enthusiasm, talents, and unique perspectives.”¹ Therefore, we believe it is critical that we ensure current and former foster children are included in efforts to further expand the federal workforce.

Every year, more than 23,000 children age out of the foster care system, and severe underinvestment in our foster youth limits their career opportunities. According to the National Foster Youth Institute, just three percent of former foster children will earn a college degree, and only half of all foster children who age out of the system will secure gainful employment by the age of 24.² As recently as 2020, data shows that within four years of aging out, 50 percent of foster youth have no earnings, and those who do make an average annual income of \$7,500.³

Earlier this year, Caucus leadership introduced H.R. 3083, the *Foster Youth Mentoring Act of 2021*, which would help connect young people in foster care with mentors and provide invaluable support to the agencies and organizations that seek to improve outcomes for foster youth through these relationships.⁴ While agencies are not required to provide mentors to interns, OPM reported that 44 percent of interns had an assigned mentor during their experience, which mirrors similar efforts the Caucus has championed in the private sector. The private sector has demonstrated success in providing career enhancement opportunities for former foster youth, and based on previous OPM guidance, we believe the Pathways Program is a natural gateway for foster youth to pursue career opportunities in the public sector.

¹ Federal Register (December 30, 2010) *Recruiting and Hiring Students and Recent Graduates*.
<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2010/12/30/2010-33169/recruiting-and-hiring-students-and-recent-graduates>

² 51 Useful Aging Out of Foster Care Statistics. *National Foster Youth Institute*, May 26, 2017 <https://nfyi.org/51-useful-aging-out-of-foster-care-statistics-social-race-media/>

³ 6 Quick Statistics On The Current State of Foster Care. *iFoster*, November 9, 2020
<https://www.ifoster.org/blogs/6-quick-statistics-on-the-current-state-of-foster-care/>

⁴ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/3083/all-info>

Increasing opportunities through federal internships can help foster youth enter the workforce and gain critical experience. According to an OPM report, surveyed agencies reported higher retention for Pathways appointees, with nearly 90 percent of appointees working in the government for at least two years.⁵ The lack of investment in our nation's foster youth has resulted in thousands of bright and passionate young adults without an opportunity to demonstrate their drive to succeed. It is our hope that OPM can work with Congress and across the federal government to increase opportunities for foster youth so we can help them reach their full potential.

We are eager to work with you on this issue and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Brenda L. Lawrence
Member of Congress



James R. Langevin
Member of Congress



Don Bacon
Member of Congress



Karen Bass
Member of Congress



Markwayne Mullin
Member of Congress

⁵ United States Office of Personnel Management. *The Pathways Programs: Their Use and Effectiveness Two Years After Implementation*. (August 2016), <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/hiring-information/students-recent-graduates/reference-materials/report-on-special-study-of-the-pathways-programs.pdf>